ON CONSTANTINOPLE STREET—A TURKISH THEATRE WITH MISSOURI MIXTURE

Hot Day on the Pike

BY FRANKLIN FYLES

THE TEMPLE OF MIRTH — MORE PROPERLY THE HOUSE OF THE FOOLISH — BAIT FOR UNWARY

St. Louis, June 23.

PEOPLE who, when at home, walk with their feet towards us, are making shows of themselves at the fair. A few got here in May, more have come in June and the tardiest will not arrive until July. A hundred Turks have just opened a Constantinople street. It is given up mainly to small shops for traffic in trinkets, but at the further end is a theatre, placed where its doorway can't be seen through the general entrance. But don't you conclude hastily that respect for dramatic art has led the Turks to isolate their stage performance from the Pike's passing multitude. The object is the reverse of that. A signboard on the outer wall says "Admission Free." But when you have walked in, turned a corner and passed the places where you are free to buy Turkish drinks, food and wares, you get to the theatre and read thereon, "Admission Twenty-five Cents." That is not an extortion, because you don't have to pay and go in; nor a trap for the unwary that you need be caught by, because if you have spent an hour on the Pike you know the baits and don't bite unless you care to; and if you do decide to enter you probably will feel that you receive your money's worth, even though the show lasts but fifteen minutes. If a theatrical entertainment in Broadway is not too high-priced at $2 for two hours and a half, then most of these at the fair are cheap enough at one-eighth the price for one-tenth the time.

At the outer gateway is a Bedouin sheik mounted on a camel. He serves for the nonce as a Turk, although his African face denies that he is Asiatic and his costume boldly confesses the truth. There is no Mediterranean sea between Turkey and Egypt here on the Pike, and the show folk from the nations of the Orient are neighborly. Likely the mimic Constantinople and Cairo streets are nearer to each other in proprietorship than the 200 yards that separate them in situation. This Arab makes a picturesque figure on his camel, as proud in pose as though he were a bandit chieftain out for the plundering of a caravan on Sahara sands instead of a mere lure for small coin on the pavement of the Pike, and few know or care who he is or whence he came.

The show given in the Constantinople theatre is 90 per cent genuine Turkish. The exceptional tenth is still more gratifying to visitors possessing a sense of humor, although it makes an American break in the row of foreigners on the stage. Six persons in the array are women and girls who dance, three are men who play tom-toms and a guitar and these nine are dressed Turkishly. The tenth is a Missouri fiddler undisguised. Why they don't take off his straw hat and put on a turban, cover his checkered shirt with a tinselled jacket and draw a pair of loose white trousers over his tight black ones I can't explain. Perhaps a rule of his trade union forbids. But can he be a union man working with those non-unionists? There he is, anyway, a native St. Louis contrast to his Constantinople companions. His presence helps the music, however, quite as much as it hurts the spectacle. His fiddle blends familiar airs into the know what they called themselves over tuneless thwacking of the tom-toms, which almost silence the flipping of the guitar. He gives a bar or two at a time of the couchee-couchee, once in a while, to preserve a far eastern atmosphere, but oftener he reminds us with his bow and catgut of a hot time in the old town, of marching through Georgia, of tenting on the old camp ground and of wishing we were in Dixie.

The American enlivenment of the music seems to be a relief to the dancers and an inspiration. They are less languorous than is usual with their kind and more active. When the curtain rises they are seated on a long divan in a room set to represent a harem.

"Hats off," a voice cries in clear English.

You look around for such a bouncer as bosses the boys in a Bowery gallery, but see instead a fat old Turk seated in the center of the house. Subsequently he watches the dancers as though they were inmates of his own harem and he expected them to make a break for liberty. I don't think he should mind it if the plainer three did get away, but the others are so pretty that our stage door girl-chasers may have tried to steal them from their proprietors.

The show begins with songs and choruses which none of us cares for and proceeds with tricks by a juggler and a combat by swordsmen which do not interest us. But they don't keep us waiting long for what we came to see.

The first of the female performers is one of the pretty three—a young woman, slim and supple, wearing the half-oriental, half-occidental garb of the harem, making no immodest exposure and dancing without indecency. Her movements are like an American waltz with a saucy Spanish twist in each turn and a mere suggestion of an Egyptian wriggle once in a while. The second is the prettiest of the fair trio, no more than 16 and not yet over being mannerly in aspect, no matter if she does come from the Tenderloin of Constantinople. Her dance is essentially the same as the others, but sprightlier and coquettish. She smiles alluringly, shakes her torso as though she had chills right along with her fever, but she refrains from abdominal convulsions. Why they next set forth the mother of that girl (she surely isn't further removed than an aunt, so striking is the facial resemblance) to give an exact copy of the youngster's dance is past guessing. The things that the slim girl has done with a dainty effect look gross when the thick woman does them. There is all the difference between these two exhibits that separates 16 from 40 years or 100 from 200 in pounds.

The third presentable creature is not Turkish, but Moorish, and if she were as fleshy as the aforesaid mother or aunt her dance would be repulsively demonstrative. But her good looks temper her bad conduct and make it tolerable, or perhaps delightful, according to the moral point of view. She is pantomimic with a tremulous, spasmodic and extremely graphic mockery of animal passion. Her exploit finishes the entertainment.

A harem beauty, made in Germany and exported to the fair from Turkey, is a sideshow. She is the sole and only object on view in a dime museum, and, while she isn't so superlatively lovely as to be a human curiosity, she and her surroundings make a noteworthy exhibit. How do I know she is a native of Germany? She is of an unmistakable German type, and a little of the German language which she spoke was correct in accent, while her Turkish was declared by a linguist to be faulty with German pronunciation. But we needn't doubt that she is from a harem in Turkey, as she says. There is no reason to deny her proud assertion that she has been one of a Turkish nobleman's concubines. She is large and proportionate, a smooth-skinned brunette, attired decorously and displayed artfully. The room is dark with tapestries and the air is scented with musk. The woman reclines on a low divan with cushions to make the pose easy and graceful. A thick veil is attached to her jeweled cap, but it is draped from the back of the head and over the couch without hiding her face. Her arms are bare, except for strings of beads, but her corsage is modestly high and her skirt reaches to her ankles, exposing little above her stockinged and slippered feet. Flowers are in a vase on a tabaret at one side of her. On the floor at the other side stands one of those oriental apparatuses, made of brass and glass, which enables her to draw tobacco smoke from a pipe bowl through water before it reaches her mouth by the way of long, flexible tube.

The woman dallies with that smoke machine when visitors are present, emitting a little lazy cloud from her lips often enough to keep the pipe from going out. But a half-emptied box of cigarettes lies beside a coffee cup within reach to indicate her habit as a smoker. Opium? If her Turkish experience has engendered an appetite for the opiate she doesn't let the spectator see any sign of it. Beer? If she indulges a German liking for the brewed beverage she keeps that out of sight, too.

While we are on the topic of a woman born in one country and brought to St. Louis as an exhibit from another, let me describe three French sirens made in America. Two weeks ago the Palais du Costumes was mentioned in this correspondence as a big but inanimate show of clothes worn by wax figures. It had been storehoused since the Paris exposition until brought to the Pike, where it languished during May and half through June. People who went into it came out unsatisfied because they had seen nothing alive. One day Rudolph Aronson, the theatrical exploiter, came along.

"Your acre of past and present clothes would be all right," he said, "if you had located it alongside the French government building, or anywhere else than on the Pike. But here the people expect to find everything alive and kicking, especially if it's from Paris."

Aronson is an old hand at the show business and knew what he was talking about. The Frenchmen turned their enterprise over to him. He has put a stage into the Palais de Costumes and on it placed among other things, three girls who, although they came here from Paris theatres, were born and bred in New York. I don't there, but their real names are Florence and they are sisters. Hardly any witness of their songs and dances doubts they are to the Paris boulevard manner born, though he may wonder at the absence of French accent in their English. They outdo the French soubrette in chic, shrug, pout, ogle and other manifestations of coquetry and they seem to have headed the Palace du Costumes away from unremunerative dignity towards prosperous foolery. Mind you, I am not telling what the Pike ought to be, but what it is.

The Temple of Mirth has a huge white head of a clown over its entrance. His face bears a broad grin, which is meant to convey the idea that there's a lot of fun in the show; but when, on coming out, you look up at him again, you take the notion that he is laughing at the people who are going in. A live clown, with a face like the other's, except that its expression varies between jocularity and anxiety, stands at the doorway. He is the barker and therefore grins to draw folks in. But he is the manager, also, and therefore the grimace changes to a frown when they stay out. Ordinarily he is a cheerful person, because his catch-dime show is thronged.

"If you don't want to pay ten cents for admission," he cackles, "then pay nothing. Go in free. There's the deadhead gate and you're welcome to it."

He points to two small tread mills set side by side, the lower ends level with the street and the upper ends inside the premises. The incline is moderate, the distance is short and so the free entrance looks easy. But the rollers are oiled and the pathway moves the instant it is stepped on. Many boys, a few men and once in a while a woman attempt the deadhead entrance. Hardly one in a hundred succeeds and almost always he is a lad who has learned that nothing but a quick dash can win the victory. A second's delay on the treadmill accelerates its speed and turns the most earnest endeavor into a hopeless backslider. So the knowing youngsters make a bold run for it and sometimes get through.

Not a Temple of Mirth in which to laugh and grow fat is this House of the Foolish. Even if the visitor is so easy to tickle that looking into concave and convex mirrors that distort him, or into peepholes so arranged that he sees his head reflected on the shoulders of grotesque beings, excites him to laughter, the physical exercise of working his own way through the show will keep him from taking on any flesh. When he attempts to go up to the second story he finds that the stairs have wabbling steps. If he reaches the floor above he discovers nothing there except a zig-zag chute through which to slide down. To call this place a bunco joint, as one angry man did, was too harsh, for people were yelling with merriment all around him.

Besides, there was a crystal maze, one of those bewildering labyrinths of mirrors in which the wanderer loses his way. Isn't it worth a dime to see yourself at every turn, coming toward you or going away, a single figure or in countless repetition, and thereby find out exactly how you look from all possible points of view? These portrayals may be discouraging, but anyway they are instructive.

STORIES ABOUT PLAYERS

It was after the papers in the dissolution of partnership case of Weber vs. Fields had been signed, and the two comedians were still playing in the Gobe theatre, Boston, that their dressing room was invaded by an outsider. He wanted to interview the pair on their determination to travel in single harness hereafter, and he gained from them a rather interesting account of their previous quarrels.

Finding them separated by no more than a trunk, the Outsider expressed some surprise that they should still be using the same dressing room.

"We have always dressed together ever since we started," said Lew Fields. "We will feel pretty strange doing it alone after this season."

"But isn't it embarrassing?" persisted the Outsider, while the comedians, stripped to the waist, were dabbing their faces and necks with cold cream to remove the grease paint. "Now you have had this row and there are such strained relations between you, I should think you would want to keep away from each other as much as possible."

"No, no," replied Lew. "We don't mind it. We have got used to it."

"Why, all that long time we didn't speak we stuck together," interposed Joe Weber, waving a towel as his lifelong partner. "You know that, Lew. We were always seen together on the street or in restaurants whenever we could be. It was a business necessity. We didn't want the public to get any idea that we were not good friends, and of course we kept right on using the same dressing room. That was for the benefit of the members of the company. Then they could only say to outsiders that apparently we were on the best of terms."

"Yes, that's about the idea," continued Lew. "And all the time we were right on the point of separating and for months did not speak to each other, except when we had to. You remember that time, Joe, when a story got out that we had quarreled and the next day we sat together on a corner shoe shining stand and you handed me peanuts to eat when anybody we knew came along. Say, we must have had about a dozen shines each. I know I paid a boy half a dollar for them. We sat there nearly an hour, and I ate more peanuts then and there than I have since I was a boy. They spoiled my dinner."

"Well, say, I ate a lot too. Don't forget that, Lew. You weren't doing all the eating."

"Maybe you did. I wasn't looking at you, because I didn't want to have anything to do with you anyway. But the main thing is the peanuts stopped the rumor that we were quarreling, and that's all we cared about."

"So you have quarreled before?" put in the Outsider.

"We never really quarreled," said Joe. "That's not the word. We have not quarreled now. We have disagreed, that's all, and we have disagreed before."

"Many times?"

"Oh, yes, lots of times."

"Were any of them serious affairs?"

"Once I was right on the point of quitting," replied Lew.

"And we didn't speak for six months," added Joe, "but for all that we never had a real quarrel. We never struck at each other or called each other names and the trouble was always patched up some way."

"Will this present trouble be patched up? Do either of you think that you will ever get together again?"

Both Mr. Weber and Mr. Fields were bending forward toward their looking glasses brushing their hair. When this question was asked they stopped short, each with a hair brush in one hand and a comb in the other. They turned around and faced each other across the "make-up" table, and for a few seconds looked steadily into each other's eyes. It was a critical moment. Even the Outsider could realize that, and that for a brief space the future of Weber & Fields was trembling in the balance.

Then Joe and Lew dropped their hands and turned toward the looking glasses again.

"No!" they both said in unison.

"It's too late," said Lew.

"Things have gone too far. The papers are signed and the matter is out of our hands. The lawyers have it now," added Joe.

So the opportunity of a reconciliation passed by.

Weber and Fields agree that their cause for separation is a disagreement as to policy. Fields wanted to branch out and to change the presence style of entertainment, which, he contended, the people were tiring of. Weber was equally anxious to let well enough alone, and wanted to stick to the form of comedy that had gained for them both fame and riches.

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Mme. Schumann-Heink, by her wholesome genuineness quite as well as by her wonderful gift as a vocalist, won many hearts on the Pacific coast. And, bless the little mother's heart, she again glories in her possession of eight healthy protests against race suicide in Germany.

And when Ashton Stevens suggested that it was a bit strange that she should have more children than all the other noted opera singers together, the madame quickly replied:

"They don't know what to be a mamma means."

"Bad for the voice?"

"That's what they think—foolish!"

"A silly superstition, eh, Mme. Schumann-Heink?"

"Nothing but nonsense. Children are the most healthy things I know. And as for the singing!—well, when I had no children I could sing just two octaves, and now that I have eight I sing all but one note of three octaves. See?"

She went to the ebony piano and struck the D of the bass clef, and then herself intoned the note to make the rumble of the piano wires sound thin, following it with a trumpet like F on the top line of the treble clef.

"That was my original register," she said, "but now"—and she went up the scale from the F—"I sing to there."

Lightly she took the note, and it was high C! Alboni's record for range was smashed to smithereens.

"A new note for every baby," she commented.

"You could be a soprano and sing the Brunhildas and Isoldes!" I ejaculated.

"Certainly," she returned, with a wink of one of the genial dark eyes that focus at slightly different angles. "But why be a number fifteen soprano when you can be a number one contralto?"

"To be sure, madame! I appreciate the rarity of the contralto voice."

"And why is it rare? Do you know?"

On such short notice I did not.

"I will tell you why, my dear sir," she said, without the least of condescension. "It is because contraltos want to be sopranos and sing leading roles, and because foolish singing teachers help them to 'raise' their voice. So they are ruined as contraltos and spoiled for sopranos. Oh, the singing teacher is an awful fellow when you get the wrong kind!"

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When "The Babes in Toyland" was at the Majestic theatre, in New York, Comedian Norris discovered among the scene shifters one named Harry who interested him particularly.

Harry has a weakness for strong language. Scene shifters as a genus are not famous for the delicacy of their diction, but most of them hesitate at certain times to express themselves violently, particularly when members of the cast are near. With Harry, however, it seems such a natural and vivid means of expression there is something so mild and naive in his manner of delivering it, that cuss words that would be objectionable with some people are regarded in him an ordinary and legitimate matter of fact.

One day, however, when Harry became tangled with a drop and the lights went out for the illumination scene, there were verbal pyrotechnics behind the spectacle that made the flaming castle and falling walls seem like the mild sputtering of a pinwheel. When Harry stopped, William Norris, feeling the limit had been passed, walked up to the now calm and industrious Harry and said severely:

"Say, where do you learn that sort of language? Don't you know there are ladies around?"

"Learn it," said Harry, with great surprise, settling into a chair. "Ye can't learn it. It's a gift, sir."

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Herr Heinrich Conried, successor to Maurice Grau, is counted the most amiable and the most successful liar of the season. And that he did lie so well the trustees of the Metropolitan opera house in New York are greatly pleased. For Herr Conried less than a year ago solemnly declared to his backers that his experiments this season would cost them a deficit of $150,000, while to the contrary he has placed a neat dividend to the account of the company. It is lying such as this that clinches a man's reputation.

This year's dividend is 6 per cent on a capital stock of $150,000 and more—how much more Herr Conried and his fellow directors will not divulge. At a liberal estimate of 10 per cent the net earnings would be only $15,000, but even this amount is quite different from a loss of $150,000.

More than a quarter of a million dollars was spent for newly costuming and staging the "Ring" music dramas, "Tannhauser," "Rigoletto" and part of "Aida," and for this only $50,000 was taken out of the receipts. But these are a tangible asset for the future, and with the enormous earning possibilities of "Parsifal" the opera's future financial success seems more than reasonable.

The gross receipts of the season were $1,150,000. "Parsifal" alone in eleven performances took in $158,308.90. So it can be easily seen how great a factor in the year's financial record was the music drama over the production and alleged despoliation of which the Wagnerites of Germany threatened to go to war with the United States. "Parsifal" was not despoiled—far from it.

The artistic results of Herr Conried's first season have already been discussed. In material results his success has greatly exceeded expectation. The Metropolitan opera house has been modernized and made infinitely better off than when he took it. He has filled the place full of ginger.

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Concerning moral and immoral plays, Miss Harned makes this distinction:

"The play in which a woman sins and is punished is a moral play. The play in which she sins and escapes punishment is immoral. Whatever shows that her punishment is inevitable has a moral influence," she said; "and there you have it."

And there, I think, you have.

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Jennie Yeamans occasionally perpetrates rhymes. Her latest one runs after this fashion, and goes best with the business of a Yeamans shrug after the second line:

A flirtation, and no one to blame;
For if you have forgotten my kisses,
I have forgotten your name.

* * *

The London newspapers are beginning to direct attention to the fact that Sir Henry Irving will complete his half century upon the stage in two years' time. A suggestion has been made that a committee be appointed to make arrangements for the celebration of this event, and that a theatre be built and presented to Sir Henry as a memorial of his achievements. Doubtless Sir Henry's jubilee will be more memorable than any event in theatrical annals since the retirement of Macready, and nobody will deny that he has fairly earned whatever honors may be showered upon him. Like Macready and Charles Kean, he is happy in enjoying a full, generous and public recognition of his eminent deserts. Samuel Phelps, who was a greater actor, and did much more for the stage than any one of the three, was honored by no public distinction. But he never knew how to crook the pregnant hinges of the knee.

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In an article on "Jean de Reszke at Home," printed in the London Daily News, details are given regarding the teaching plans of the greatest tenor of all times and countries. The writer, John Macdonald, describes the De Reszke method as "the old Italian method, amalgamated, so to speak, with the French and the Wagnerian styles." Only about twenty pupils are to be received at the start in his school at 53 Rue de la Faisanderie. And the accepted candidates must have something more than pleasing voices. "What the man in the street, or the gods in the gallery, or even the upper ten in the boxes, may regard as a very good voice may or may not satisfy the master. There must be something in the voice besides sound—something of the mind, the feeling, the passion, that some day will make the singer an artist. And M. de Reszke, himself the most exquisite and versatile, variously gifted, most catholic, so to speak, singer of our modern day, is, in his testing of his would-be pupils, as patient and sympathetic as he is inexorable." After the holidays the students are to be introduced to the second part of their training—the declamatory, theatrical, dramatic.

UP OR DOWN STREAM?

Likewise Fly Fishing Versus Bait Fishing.

(Edwin Sandys in Outing.)

In fly-fishing, as in many other arts, there are more ways than one for the successful accomplishment of the object in view. I know experts who, if allowed the choice, never would fish other than up stream, explaining their preference by the fact that the moving if not rapid water is then less liable to carry any sound of disturbed stones or foot movement to the fish. This is reasonable enough, and many fine fish are killed in that way. Other anglers scorn the idea of working against the stream, and say, "Avoid the disturbing of stones and other sounds. The fish always lie with their noses up stream and their eyes looking for what the water brings down. Therefore, be natural, and send the lure down, as the real fly would come." This is sound sense, for beyond question the more naturally a lure is presented the more tempting it should prove; hence the reader might say "the down stream theory appeals to my judgment and I'll follow it." That's all very well, but suppose, when working either up or down stream, a bend happens to bring a low sun directly behind you—what then?

So far as I know there are few things which go thoroughly alarm trout as the shadow of a man, or of his arm and rod shifting over a pool. When the complicated shadows of a lot of breeze-stirred branches are playing all over the surface, the addition of a few extra shadows may not greatly matter; but these days are comparatively rare, and even then it would seem that an unusually large shadow would of necessity be noticed. This suggests that upon the typical winding stream, alternate sections of which needs must trend toward widely apart points on the compass, a man will have considerable trouble to keep control of his warning shadow. This is best accomplished by a canny shifting from side to side as occasion may demand, and I believe this maneuver to be well worth the slight trouble it involves. A wise man never suffers a shadow of his making to touch the water to be fished.

And now in regard to bait fishing—that shocking plebian sport which your bigoted flicker of humbugs deems a gory old crime. I believe in scientific bait fishing for several reasons, chief of which is its likelihood to catch fish, and the biggest and bulliest fish there be. I don't mean a whole lot of fish, but hay a couple.

The Angler's Toast.

When men meet to drink to those they love most,
Let anglers fill up their cups for a toast,
Touch lip to no glass
To proud dame or lass
Who from gentle sport will tempt you to stray;
But let your cups clink,
Ye anglers, and drink
A health to the fish,
To the biggest fish,
The fish that got away!

You lured him by craft; he fought you at odds—
In fair fight or foul, he splintered your rods,
Barbed weapon of steel
You've often made him feel,
But, valiant and strong, he won every fray.
Then fill to the brim
And drink deep to him—
A toast to the fish,
To the biggest fish,
The fish that got away!

What others you've killed with cunning and skill
You've never caught him and you never will.
In brook, lake or sea,
The monarch is he—
Ye anglers, stand up and due homage pay.
Let every glass ring
A toast to the king—
Long life to the fish,
To the biggest fish,
The fish that got away!
—Norman Jeffries in New York Sun.